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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 001236

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - RENEWED FIGHTING INFLECTS HEAVY TFG
LOSSES

Classified By: Counselor for Somalia Affairs Bob Patterson for reasons
1.4 b,d.

¶1. (C) Summary: On June 16, renewed fighting erupted in Mogadishu after almost two weeks of tenuous calm. Al-Shabaab launched the first attack in Galgalato, on the outskirts to Mogadishu which ended in a stalemate. In a public statement, al-Shabaab claimed it launched the attack to fight extortion by government forces along roads in the area, an accusation all of our contacts in the area confirm was unfounded. Early morning June 17, the TFG made immediate gains from an attack it launched in Mogadishu's Hodan district, but after intense fighting, was unable to hold its position. During the two days of fighting, the TFG suffered heavy losses including 30 killed, among them a prominent TFG police colonel, and at least 50 wounded. It also lost at least three &technicals.8 The Prime Minister and the Chief of Police told us the extremists were well-armed, with a seemingly endless supply of heavy ammunition, and surprisingly well-trained. There was renewed fighting reported in Mogadishu's Karaan District on the afternoon of June 18. End Summary.

Renewed Fighting
Breaks Tenuous Calm in Mogadishu

¶2. (C) Following almost two weeks of relative calm, fighting erupted on June 16-17 between extremist groups, including al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam, and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) troops in Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab initiated the most recent round of fighting on June 16 when it launched an attack in Galgalato, on the northeastern outskirts of Mogadishu. Quick at the media trigger, al-Shabaab claimed it launched the attack to defend residents against extortion by TFG forces at checkpoints across the main road in Galgalato. Many sources confirmed al-Shabaab,s claim as baseless and there have been no reports of government extortion. However, al-Shabaab,s framing the TFG as corrupt and taking advantage of Mogadishu,s citizens demonstrates a new, and possibly potent, public relations tactic. The TFG has yet to confront the charge in the media.

¶3. (C) In the face of the al-Shabaab offensive, TFG troops briefly lost ground, but eventually reclaimed their original positions, but reportedly lost three faulty &technicals8 (trucks outfitted with anti-aircraft guns) to al-Shabaab in the fighting. The fighting in Galgalato ended in stalemate at the end of the day on June 16.

TFG Unable to Sustain
Early Gains

14. (C) On June 17, TFG troops registered quick gains in early morning attacks against extremist positions in Hodan district of Mogadishu. Chief of Police General Abdi Hassan & Qeybdiid told us TFG troops gained control of several extremist controlled locations including areas around the former army hospital, the milk factory, Tarabunka, the former Hodan police station, and African Village. However, al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam militias fought back with intensity and with & surprisingly heavy8 firepower. Unfortunately, Qeybdiid told us, TFG troops were forced to retreat from all the areas except Tarabunka square. Qeybdiid told us that "extremist militia are battle hardened, stronger, show extreme endurance and are better trained" than the government forces.

Al-Shabaab Counter Attack

15. (C) In a tactical move to deflect pressure in Hodan district, al-Shabaab moved its forces from the Galgalato area to attack Karaan (southeastern Mogadishu), at a point about 2 kilometers from Villa Somalia. Al-Shabaab successfully gained control of parts of Karaan that were previously held by the TFG. Qeybdiid told us that in addition to logistical problems that prevented the TFG from successfully holding

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their positions, the attack on Karaan forced the TFG troops to retreat from positions in Hodan district to send reinforcements to Karaan. The extremist forces have reportedly gained control of Kawaan Bari, Keysaney Hospital, and Bulo Mahaay areas in the Karaan district.

16. (C) In addition to Karaan, al-Shabaab launched attacks at the Dabka Junction at Maka-al Mukarama road, a crucial area for the TFG, as it is the road which links the presidency and airport. Reportedly, the June 17 afternoon al-Shabaab attack on Dabka road junction caught TFG troops completely by surprise. The TFG forces suffered high casualties and temporarily lost possession of the junction to al-Shabaab. AMISOM intervened with mortar attacks, forcing al-Shabaab fighters to retreat. The fighting in this area lasted for approximately two hours.

Hawiye Council Condemns AMISOM

17. (C) On June 18, the Hawiye Traditional and Unity Council (HTUC) condemned AMISOM for indiscriminate shelling of residential areas in June 17 fighting in Mogadishu. There were several local media reports of AMISOM shelling residential areas, including some outside the immediate conflict area. According to the media, most of the civilian casualties were a result of mortars hitting homes in areas surrounding the districts where the fighting was taking place. There are reports that eleven civilians were killed by an AMISOM mortar shell which hit a mosque in Karaan district on June 17. Several of our contacts reported that 19 or 20 persons were killed in the mosque, though they attributed the attack to "opposition forces."

TFG Suffers Significant Casualties

18. (C) Prime Minister Omar Sharmarke, on a visit in Nairobi, confirmed to us that the TFG suffered significant casualties in the June 16 - 17 fighting. The PM told us that 30 TFG troops were killed, though he did not specify during in which

battle the casualties were sustained. Sharmarke said many of the TFG troops sustained injuries and several were being flown to Nairobi for medical treatment. (Note: Mogadishu media outlets have also reported thirty killed and at least fifty injured). The PM also confirmed that on June 16, the TFG lost three & technicals.⁸ He said that the death of Colonel Ali Said Sheikh Hassan, Banadir region police commander and the commander in charge of security operations, dampened the spirit of the TFG troops.

¶9. (C) Unconfirmed reports indicate that al-Shabaab has recently received significant funding from outside sources, militia reinforcement, heavy artillery, and new supplies. According to non-TFG sources in Mogadishu, extremist fighters were seen moving from Dayniile outskirts and former defense ministry headquarters to reinforce other fighters in conflict zones in Hodan district. The TFG was not nearly as organized its ability to relieve and re-supply its own force. The Prime Minister admitted being surprised by the strength and organization of the opposition, and asked for urgent provision of ammunition and weapons.

Comment

¶10. (C) Prior to the recent clashes in Mogadishu, there were reports of a significant military buildup on both sides. The outcome of the fighting demonstrated the relative strength of the al-Shabaab and Hisbul Islam forces. The Prime Minister appealed to us for the immediate transfer of ammunition promised from Uganda. The TFG forces, most of whom have received little or no formal training, are being challenged by the discipline and endurance of extremist forces. While the TFG hoped that new offensives would allow them decisive victories in Mogadishu, they gained no new ground and sustained significant losses just holding on to their original positions. With new media tactics, extremist groups are trying to portray TFG as corrupt, like the Yusuf

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government that preceded it, and wholly dependent on AMISOM. Thus far, the TFG has not countered with messages of its own. While the PM told us President Sharif planned to hold a press conference on June 17 in Mogadishu, the TFG has not yet publicly addressed the recent fighting.
RANNEBERGER